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ABSTRACT

Based on Piaget's theory "children learn best by doing," play offers a natural way of learning for young children. The "Playful Teaching" Workshop Sampler offers teachers several different movement activities for incorporation into academic classroom curricula. The play ideas were presented at national and regional teaching workshops. The publication concludes with the author's views on why high quality play curricula promote academic readiness for early learners. It is argued that purposeful play provides an effective avenue for advancing sensory and perceptual motor development and allows young children to begin to visualize learning as fun and to see themselves as capable learners. Play addresses the needs of all kinds of learners...the kinesthetic child, the tactile child, the auditory child, and the visual child. Different learning styles are encouraged through the freedom of playful movement activity. This sampler, organized into four sections, shares play ideas relating to: (1) the movement pattern of a snake; (2) the movement pattern of a horse; (3) basic balance concepts; and (4) ball manipulation. Each of the 20 activities provided includes descriptions of both necessary equipment and procedures. (LL)

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ED 406 325

PLAYFUL TEACHING

Workshop Sampler

CLASSROOM PLAY IDEAS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Donna Battista

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Author's Notes

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SNAKES ALIVE

Play ideas relating to the movement pattern of a snake

1 Yarn Snake

Equipment Needed

12 inch piece of yarn for each child; books, pictures and/or a toy snake

Procedure

1) Display and discuss several pictures of different kinds of snakes. Encourage the children to offer their personal knowledge of snakes.

2) Pass out a yarn piece to each child. Introduce this yarn piece as their own pet snake. Challenge the children to try the following manipulative skills (snake tricks) with their yarn snake and their own body:

Who can make their snake/body lay in a straight line? curly line?

Who can make their snake's tail touch their snake's head? their head touch their feet? What shape is this? (circle, oval)

Who can make their snake/body form a letter? a number?

3) Invite the children to follow verbal directions to make their snake move on their body? Who can make their snake climb **around** their ankle? **up** their leg? **around** the knee? **on top of** their stomach? **next to** their elbow? near their neck? **under** their chin? **across** their face? on **top of** their head? stand up and turn in a circle with their snake **on** their head? **Reverse the directions** to return snake to the floor...**down** to your neck, **across** your chest, etc. Invite the children to take their pet snake home to encourage "at-home" play.

3 Tunnel Snake

Equipment Needed

Crawl tunnel

Procedure

1) Introduce the tunnel to the children by allowing it to spring up from a coiled position. Invite the children to imitate the same movement with their own bodies. First, beginning in the **layout snake position**, ask the children to pull their body quickly **into a circle on the command "coil"**. Next, tell the children to quickly **return their bodies to the snake position on the command "uncoil"**. Repeat several times. Challenge the children to do this task from different beginning positions...snake on stomach, snake on side, snake on back.

2) Invite the children to **slither their body through the tunnel.** This can be done as a relay by lining up children at both entrances to the tunnel. As one child comes out, he tags the next child, and that child then proceeds through the tunnel. Continue until all children have completed the task.

3) This next task requires the children to roll sideward inside the tunnel. Ask the children to pretend a little snake (child) gets swallowed by a big snake (tent). The only way to free yourself is to make the big snake dizzy so the little snake can escape. Individually, invite each child to **crawl into the tunnel and maneuver the tunnel to rotate across the play area**. Once the child rotates three times, the little snake can crawl out and escape.

4 Snake Tricks

Equipment Needed

Toy snake(s) and pictures of various kinds of snakes, rope, 2 chairs, tunnel, 3 green liter pop bottles.

Procedure

1) Once again, encourage **children to share personal knowledge and/or stories about snakes.** Walk around with the toy snakes as information is shared. Discuss where snakes live, their different colors and names, their habitats, etc.

2) Begin to physically challenge the children: If you were a snake, show me what you would look like **on top of** your color mat. Who can **lay on their stomach** like a snake? **their back**? on **their side**? **roll over**? **wiggle** their tail? **lift** their head and hiss?

3) Set up various obstacles for the snake to clear...**under** the poison vine (rope over two chairs), **through** the log (crawl tunnel), **in and out** of the bushes (3 green liter pop bottles),etc. You can actually tell a story as you add different obstacles to the course...Once there was a snake who lived in a jungle and every day he would **slither under** a poison vine...Once there was a snake who lived in a jungle and everyday he would **slither under** a poison vine and **through** a log...etc.

5 Snake Games

Equipment Needed

2 pieces of rope, several pieces of insulation tubing cut up into 3 inch pieces, one long jump rope

Procedure

1) **World's largest snake:** Invite the children to once again **become a snake with their body.** Pair up the children. Challenge them to **become one large snake** by one child holding the other child's ankles. Ask them to **perform tricks together** such as roll over, crawl forward, crawl backward, lift tail, lift head, etc. Next join two pairs together (four children grouped together) and repeat the challenges. Continue until the entire class has **become the "World's Largest Snake"!** Repeat the challenges.

2) **Rattler Relay:** Separate the children into two lines. Give the first child of each line a piece of rope, knotted at one end. Across the room, place two equal piles of cut up insulation tubing (snake rattlers). Tell the children they will be asked individually to **slither across the room** with their tail in hand (piece of rope) to **retrieve a piece of rattler** to add to their tail (insulation tubing). Then they will **pass the tail** on to the next snake in their line to do the same. Continue until all children have had a chance to participate or until all the rattlers have been added to the tails.

3) **Sleeping Snake:** Locate children all at one end of the play area. **Lay out a large jump rope** in the middle of the area against the floor, manned on each end by a teacher. Introduce the children to the rope as if it were a sleeping snake. Invite the children to **quietly step over the snake** without touching him. After the last child has crossed over, teachers begin **softly to move the rope back and forth**. Indicate they must have awakened the snake. Invite them to once again to carefully step or jump over the snake without touching him. Continue the game in this same manner until the rope is jumping up and down wildly, one **teacher releases one end of rope** and the snake appears to chase the children. Great fun but be sensitive to younger children. This may appear real.

HORSING AROUND

Play ideas relating to the movement pattern of a horse

1 Horse Sounds

Equipment Needed

lummi sticks and/or hand sleigh bells, picture of horses, toy horses, coffee can with lid

Procedure

1) Display and discuss several pictures of different kinds of horses. Encourage the **children to offer their personal knowledge of horses.**

2) **Seat the children in a circle.** Tell the children horses are usually kept inside a fence or a corral **(indicate the circle of children as the corral).** The only way the horse can get out is through a fence (make an opening at each end of the circle to represent the gates). Ask the children if they know what sound a horse makes? Allow them to offer their many sounds. Tell the children even the horse's feet make a special sound (gallop). **Teacher makes the sound with her hands by clapping out rhythm** and invites the children to do the same. Invite **half the children to move inside the corral like a horse** and the **others to clap out the gallop**. Exchange roles. Use "giddy-up" and "whoa" to begin and end the movement.

3) **Pass out the lummi sticks or bells to half the class.** Invite the **others to line up** behind the teacher (lead horse) and follow. First **move the horses (children) inside the circle**, then lead them outside through a gate. Lead them in a **gallop around the outside** of the circle two or three times then lead them back through a gate and return them to their stalls (mats). **Reverse roles** with the other group of children.

2 Leaping Challenges

Equipment

paper bags, foam sponges, vinyl mats

Procedure

1) **Discuss the movement of horses** they have seen...racing horses, circus horses, work horse, etc. Try to lead them into **discussion about the equestrian horses** who leap over fences and water. Explain horses are very good jumpers and their legs are very strong. Invite the children to **"leap" over their sitting mats**. Allow several attempts.

2) Place three blue vinyl mats (rivers) in the center of the play area, spaced about three feet apart. Challenge the horses (children) to line up and try to **leap over the river** without touching the water (mats). Allow all children to participate then clear the area. Next place 3 paperbags (standing up and folded midway) in the center of the play area. Invite the children to line up and try to **clear all 3 fences (bags)** without knocking them over. Allow all children several attempts to try tasks.

3) Outside the sitting circle, place several obstacles to jump and leap over. Designate the beginning of the **equestrian trail** with a mat so children will know where to begin the challenge. **Create several different kinds of jumps** with sponges and other soft materials. A **water hole** can be created by adding a blue vinyl mat next to the hurdle. Invite the children to line up and **complete the entire course.**

3 *Horse and Rider*

Equipment

hula hoops and/or jump ropes, soft materials to represent fences and equestrian jumps

Procedure

1) Briefly **discuss equestrian riding** with children...the Olympics, personal experiences, T.V., etc. Focus the talk on both the horse and the rider working together to accomplish a task together. Pictures or visual cues could help the children visualize a little easier.

2) **Introduce the children to the word bridle**. Explain how this piece of equipment helps the rider guide the horse. Tell the children the horse knows which way to turn from the way the rider pulls the "reins". Invite the horses (children) to stand up in their barn (mats). Tell the children you are the rider and you are going to pretend you are riding them. The **teacher imagines to hold "reins" in his/her hands**. The teacher says "giddy-up" and invites the horses to gallop in place in their barn. When the **teacher pulls her imaginary reins** to the right, the children are to turn right and continue to gallop in place. Repeat with left side directions. Continue play, **changing directions several times**. End activity with the "whoa" command.

3) **Set-up an obstacle jumping course** by combining various sponges, ropes, and other soft materials. Show the children a hula hoop and tell them you are going to pretend this hoop is a bridle and reins. Ask one child to stand. **Teacher bridles the horse (child) by simply placing the hoop over the child** and inviting him/her to hold on to the sides for support. The teacher holds on to the back side of the hoop to imitate a rider holding the reins of a bridle. Tell the children **you are the rider and the child is your horse.** You are going to try and **complete the obstacle course together as a team.** Line up at the beginning of the course and jump out the challenges together with the horse leading, followed by the rider. Pass out other hoops and **pair up the children to do the same.**

4 Polo

Equipment

hula hoops, 30" insulation tubes, beachballs, materials for goals

Procedure

1) **Introduce the children to the game of "polo"** by talking first about a closely related game that would be more familiar to them, such as soccer or croquet. Talk about how a ball is used to score a goal. The ball is moved by the foot in soccer and a "mallet" in croquet. The ball is followed by the player and then kicked (soccer) and hit (croquet) to guide it towards the goal. Tell the children polo is a game that also involves moving a ball to score a goal but both horse and rider has to work as a team to achieve the task.

2) **Introduce the equipment** to be used: mallet (insulation tube), polo ball (beachball), and the bridle (hula hoop). Invite teams of horse and riders to enter play area (number of players should be determined by available space). Invite the **teams to maneuver a ball with their mallets** around 2-3 chairs set up in the middle of the activity area.

3) **Set up an actual polo game situation**. Designate a goal at each end of the room (a rope draped over the top of 2 chairs). Invite 2 teams of players to try and move a game ball to their goal at the blow of a whistle. Begin the ball on a center mark. At the sound of a whistle, the two teams try to move the game ball to their goal. **Switch out teams** every time a goal is scored. **Emphasize participation and not winning.**

5 Round Up Time

Equipment

hula hoops, hoop holders, sponges, rivers (blue vinyl mats or material), gates (cones), bridges (floor beams)

Procedure

1) Invite all the children to sit on the **mats placed in a circle to represent a corral**. Designate two gates (one of each end of the circle) for the horses to pass through with a hula hoop standing vertical in 2 hoop holders. Tell the children they are going to play a game and act out a story. **Set up a "range" outside the corral** by using sponges as "sage brush" , blue mats/material as rivers, and floor beams as bridges.

2) **Play the game "round up".** Appoint 3-4 pairs of children as "ranch hands" (horse and rider) who will help bring in the wild horses that escape. Ropes can be used as bridles placed around the horses stomach. Invite all the other children to be wild horses. Invite the **wild horses to gallop in the corral until teacher yells "run"**. The **horses then pass through the gates and run all over the outside play space** (the range). The **"ranch hands"** then go out and try to **tag the wild horses**. If **tagged, they must return to their barn. Reverse children's roles.**

3) **Teacher tells a story.** Example: Once there were a group of wild horses who were captured inside a corral. They galloped **inside the fence**, went **through the gates**, **leaped over some rivers**, then came **back home, through the gates** and returned to their barns. Reverse roles and **repeat the story**, but change the directions by **adding on to the story.** Example: Once there were a group of wild horses who were captured inside a corral. They galloped inside the fence. They went through the gates, leaped over some rivers, **crossed over a bridge,** and came back home, through the gates, and returned to their barns. Continue game to **include all children and all obstacles**.

KEEP IT BALANCED

Play ideas relating to basic balance concepts

1 Cup Construction

Equipment

small plastic cups (6 per child), larger plastic cups (6 for instructor), drawings/pictures of a pyramid, skyscraper, and a castle

Procedure

1) **Invite the children to offer their interpretation of "What is balance?".** Allow the children to demonstrate on their sitting mats. Tell the children when they are not falling down, they are **"in balance".** Invite the children to show you a balance. Tell the children when you are not falling down, you are **"out of balance"**. Invite the children to carefully fall out of balance. Repeat this activity several times.

2) **Pass 6 small cups** to each participant. Teacher works with bigger cups as a visual guide. Invite the children to **place their cups in a straight line.** Try to work the children into forming a horizontal line. Ask all the children to face their cups with the big side down. **Set patterns with your cups** and invite the children to repeat the pattern with their cups. Example: 2 down-2 up-2 down, 1 up-1 down-1 up-1 down-1 up-1 down, 3 up-3 down, etc..

3) **Begin stacking the cups.** Show the children a **picture of a pyramid** then challenge them to build one with their cups...3 down on the bottom, 2 stacked down in the middle, 1 placed down on top. Allow the children's interpretation first before you stack your cups. Recognize all efforts then "positively" guide the children to the desired cup placement. Tell the children **"points of balance" are the number of supports touching the floor**. Ask the children how many points (cups) are touching the floor? Three! There are three points of balance in our pyramid structure. **Repeat the same stacking exercise with the picture of a "skyscraper" and a "castle"**.

2 *String Beams*

Equipment

long piece (10 ft.) of rope, piece of yarn (4-5ft.) for each child and teacher

Procedure

1) **Layout the roping** in the middle of the play space. Ask the children if they have ever seen a person in the circus walk across a rope high up in the air? Encourage them to share experiences. **Lead the conversion towards the term "tight rope walker"**. Tell the children you are going to pretend to be a tight rope walker who is crossing a rope 100 feet up in the air. Dramatically, **walk the rope in the play area,** pretending you are very high up in the air. Fake almost losing your balance. Finish to the end and raise your arms to indicate you are done. Say "Ta-da!".

2) **Invite the children to become tight rope walkers** and pass out a piece of yarn to each student. Ask them to find a space to **stretch out the string on the floor**. Challenge the **children to walk the rope**, perform various balances with different points of balance, change direction, etc..

3) Invite the students to **make various shapes with their strings.**..a circle, triangle, numbers, letters, etc.. ...then walk it out. Tell the children they are going to **create the world's largest tight rope**. Challenge the children, one by one, to add their string to your rope. Allow them to bend and form their line anyway they want. Continue until all children have added their string to form a very long, continuos line. **Invite the children to cross over this line without losing their balance.**

3 Fuzzies

Equipment

cottonballs, yarn strings, plastic spoons, peacock feathers

Procedure

1) Ask the **children to demonstrate different points of balance with their bodies**. Say "Show me a two point balance" (2 body parts touching the floor). Allow children time to experiment with positions by asking them to show you a different two point balance. Lead the children all the way to a five point balance.

2) Pass out a **cottonball to each child**. Invite the children to **place it on their hand and balance it.** Begin to **name different body parts** ... elbow, knee, ankle, head,ect. ... to place their cotton ball. Call the cotton balls "fuzzies". Invite the children to **place their fuzzies on their head**. Ask them to try and go from a sitting position to a kneeling position ...to a standing position, turn a circle, return to a kneeling position, return to a sitting position ... ... without dropping their fuzzies

3) Invite the children to **lay out their yarn strings and pretend they are a road**. Challenge them to **take their fuzzies on a journey over their road balanced somewhere on their body.** Complicate the task by introducing **the "fuzzy mobile"** (plastic spoon). Tell the children the spoons are special cars for fuzzies. Pass out the **spoons to all children** and invite them to **take their fuzzies for a ride in their fuzzy mobile** over their string.

4 Hand Balances

Equipment

insulation tubes (18-24" long), paper/foam/plastic plates, small cups, foam balls, peacock feathers

Procedure

1) Ask the children to **recall the tight rope walkers**. Encourage them to **share any special tricks** they may have seen performed. **Lead the children to "hand balances".** Tell the children the performer makes the trick more difficult by balancing both the body and the object.

2) **Introduce several hand balancing challenges** to the children:

icecream cone: small cup held with mouth up balancing a foam ball
candle: toilet paper tube with a foam ball balanced on top
rolling meatball: foam ball on a paper/foam/plastic plate
umbrella: insulation tubes holding a paper/foam/plastic plate

Invite the **children to walk their strings while holding their various hand balances**.

3) Tell the children you have something very special for them to balance in their hand. **Show them a peacock feather** and ask if anyone knows what bird this comes from? **Briefly discuss their knowledge of the peacock as you balance it on your hand.** Explain to the children these are very fragile feathers and have to be handled with great care. **Pass out a feather to each child** and allow him/her to try and **balance the feather on their hand.** Lift the challenge by inviting them to try and **balance their feathers on different parts of their bodies.**

5 *Types of Surfaces*

Equipment

yarn, various sized ropes, foam/wood/plastic balance beams, p.v.c. tubing (sliced in half to create an arch), commercial dome steppers

Procedure

1) Lay out an entire balance track composed of yarn outside the sitting area. Mark the beginning of the track with a green mat indicating "go". Mark the end of the track with a red mat indicating "stop". Begin a discussion on trains and tracks. Allow the children to share train stories leading them to understand a train can only move on top of a track.

2) Invite the children to enter the balance referring to it as a "train track". Tell them to pretend they are a train and they are to follow the track. Challenge the children to try and not "derail" (fall off) the track. Allow the children to walk the track individually, then as a connected train (children hold hands and perform task as a team).

3) Lift the balance challenges by adding various balance surfaces to the track as bridges: different kinds of beams, ropes,etc. Add the challenges one or two at a time. Each time a new item is added, allow the children to enter the track, first individually then as a team.

HAVE A BALL

Play ideas relating to ball manipulation

1 Balloon Touch

Equipment

pictures of different sports involving balls, balloons, whistle

Procedure

1) Invite the children to sit on their mats. Briefly discuss balls...different kinds, games involving balls, various ways to move them...allowing children to share their experiences. Pictures will help stimulate conversation.

2) Show the children a balloon. Tell the children the word "balloon" has the word "ball" in it. Compare how a balloon and a ball are similar. Allow children to offer their ideas. Talk about likes and differences in shape, movement, and speed. While standing, hold the balloon over your head and then drop it. Allow it to almost touch the floor then stop or "catch" the balloon. Remark how you have to watch the balloon closely in order to catch it. Repeat this activity in front of the children 2-3 times, then invite the children to join in. Pass out the balloons and let the students experiment with the drop and catch activity. **(WARNING: Do not leave children unattended during play with balloons due to potential danger of choking if placed in the mouth. Be aware of "auditory fear" of balloons breaking. Be sensitive to children's needs.)** Lift the challenge by changing the position of the body. This creates new problem solving involving body awareness, speed and reaction time. Challenge the children to try this task while kneeling. Increase the difficulty by inviting the children to try it while lying on their backs.

3) Repeat the above activity but instead of drop and catch, hit or "volley" the balloon continuously from various body positions.

2 *Add Apparatus*

Equipment

insulation tubes (18-24"), balloons, wire hanger rackets (made from a hanger and knee high nylon hose), rolled up newspaper wands (held with a rubberband), pictures and/or samples of ball sporting equipment.

Procedure

1) Help the children recall games using balls. Begin a discussion on "what else besides the ball is used ?" in these games. Example: Baseball ...bat, glove, bases, etc. Allow the children to offer experiences. Lead conversation to "equipment used in a game is called apparatus". Reverse the thinking process. Instead of naming the sport, name the apparatus and challenge the children to name the sport it comes from. Pictures or samples of equipment could stimulate the conversation.

2) Invite the children to balloon play once again, only this time, challenge the children to manipulate the balloon with a named body part. Example: Who can volley or hit their balloon with their hand...head...elbow...knee...foot...etc. ? Change their body positions to increase the difficulty.

3) Add apparatus. Pass out various items to manipulate the movement of their balloons (newspaper wands, insulation tubes, wire hanger rackets). Begin by challenging the children to move the balloon in an upward direction towards the ceiling. Next, name a target for the children to move their balloon towards ... the door ... the window ... the blue chair ... etc. Challenge the children to move their balloon against the floor.

3 Stationary Targets

Equipment

laundry baskets, buckets, hula hoops, hoop holders, paperbags, paper plates, liter bottles, soft ball manipulatives (beanbags, beachballs, foam balls, paper balls, etc.)

Procedure

1) Stimulate a brief discussion on targets used in various ball sports. Example(s): Basketball-hoop, Baseball-glove, Soccer-goal net, etc. Allow the children to offer their personal experiences with hitting targets.

2) Set up various target stations using the "throwing" skill. Example(s): beachball into a laundry basket on the floor, foam ball into a bucket on the floor, beanbags into a hoop on the floor, beanbags onto a paperplate on the floor, tennis ball into a paperbag on the floor, etc. Increase the challenges by placing the targets on a chair or having a child hold a target for another child.

3) Set up various target stations using the "rolling/sliding" skill. Example(s): sliding a beanbag to hit someone's feet, slide a beanbag to knock over an empty pop can, rolling a beachball to knock over a liter bottle, rolling a tennis ball inside an opened paperbag on the floor, etc.

4 Moving Targets

Equipment

various balls manipulatives, funny shoes and hat, soft-sided mask, radio-controlled car, battery controlled toy, pulled toy on a string

Procedure

1) Pair up the children. Pass out a beanbag to each set of partners. Position the children 4-5 feet away from each other. Invite them to slide their beanbag to hit their partner's feet. Reverse the roles as shooters and targets. After several attempts by both partners, invite the child who is the target to avoid getting hit by jumping or moving as the beanbag comes close to their feet. Allow the children to experience this new element of timing for several minutes. Next, ask the children to form 2 lines facing each other about 10 feet apart. Tell the children you are going to walk down the center of the lines and they are to try and slide their beanbag to hit your feet. Silly shoes can be worn to stimulate the play factor. A pulled toy can also serve as a target. Teacher increases his/her speed with each passing to increase the challenge.

2) Pass out beachballs to each partner. Position the partners 4-5 feet apart. Invite them to try and toss their ball to their partner. Partner returns the ball the same way after catching it. Allow several exchanges between partners. Lift the challenge by asking the ball thrower to try and hit the partner. Invite the partner to avoid getting hit. Permit several throws back and forth. Then invite the children to return to 2 lines facing each other, about 10 feet apart. The instructor walks down the center wearing a soft- sided mask or a silly hat as the target. Mechanical or battery controlled toys can also be used as targets. Allow the children several attempts to hit the target.

3) The mask can be used to induce a run and chase game with balls. First begin by partners chasing each other, trying to hit each other with foam balls. After a few minutes of play, teacher then designates himself/herself as the target (wearing silly mask) and the children chase the instructor around the play area.

5 Cloud People

Equipment

large recycling bags, rubberbands

Procedure

1) Invite the children to sit down on their mats. Tell the children you have brought them some very special pretend friends to play with today. Show the children a "cloud person". (Directions to make "cloud people": Fill recycling bags by simply opening the mouth of the bag and turn around in a circle to capture air inside the bag. Once filled, quickly close the mouth of the bag and secure with a rubberband. A face can be drawn on the bag to help children visualize the bags as people. **WARNING**: **Do not allow children to play unattended with bags due to potential dangers of suffocation.**) Briefly allow children to share their knowledge of clouds. Guide conversation to where clouds are found (up in the sky) and their physical characteristics (light, fluffy, soft,etc.).

2) Invite the children to stand. Pass out a cloud person to each child. Remind the children to be very gentle and soft when playing with their new friend because they are made of air. If the air escapes, the cloud person will deflate and won't be able to float. Begin play by challenging the children to lift their cloud person upward and release. Allow the cloud person to float to the floor. Repeat several times then invite the children to toss and gently catch their cloud person. Remind the children to gently catch their friend.

3) Invite the children to try some tricks with their new friend ... who can catch on their knees? on their back? toss and turn a circle before catching? toss and go under their cloud person? toss their cloud person to someone else?

Author's Notes

Please consider your enviorment and the developmental age of your children in the presentation of your class. Safety and success is your primary concern.

My deepest appreciation to all those who help change a child's life in a positive, uplifting way. Every touch of a child can either build or tear down the construction of their mind, body and spirit. Let us always remember the power and the responsibility of teaching children to soar.

Thanks!
Donna J. Battista

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An Author's view

WHY IS TEACHING CHILDREN THROUGH PLAY AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR EARLY LEARNING?

High-quality play curriculums promote academic readiness for early learners. Based on Piaget's theory "Children learn best by doing", play offers a natural way of learning for young children. Play is children's work. Through experimentation and problem-solving involving the whole self, one constructs internal knowledge which creates permanent understanding of various concepts in the cognitive and affective domain. The self-knowledge constructed by the child himself will serve as the basic tools for forming the process of logic.

Purposeful play provides an effective avenue for advancing sensory and perceptional motor development. Through play, children joyfully and naturally learn many needed readiness skills for reading, writing and math. Their eyes learn to focus and track by following yarn or an airborne ball. Children experiment with gripping and grasping through crumbling paper and squeezing various shaped balls. They begin to make exploratory estimates of speed, balance, height and distance through jumping and running. Play allows young children to begin to visualize learning as fun and to see themselves as capable learners.

If children do not learn the way we teach them, then as educators, we have the responsibility to teach them the way they learn best. Play addresses the needs of all kind of learners.. the kinesthetic child, the tactile child, the auditory child, and the visual child. Different learning styles are celebrated and encouraged through the freedom of playful movement activity.

Children embrace the opportunity to play because it is fun and non-judgmental. It is an opportunity for children to socialize and communicate their "inner-self". The very nature of play allows us to make mistakes and laugh at ourselves. Children feel validated and successful when their needs are addressed at their own development level. Play builds healthy self-esteems, promotes respect for others and encourages creativity.

The **"PLAYFUL TEACHING"** Workshop Sampler offers teachers several different play theme activities to implement into their classroom curriculum. The sampler shares numerous teaching play ideas presented at national and regional teaching workshops by Animated Learning Systems.

Donna Battista, author of **"PLAYFUL TEACHING"** and numerous other educational play curriculums, combines academics with fun to create an effective method of advancing young learners. A former early elementary school teacher and collegiate gymnast, Mrs. Battista blends her two areas of academic and physical knowledge, to create a playful kinetic curriculum for preschool and early elementary.

The author contends "play" allows teaching and learning to become animated and joyful. It creates a happiness that is contagious. In the words of Lord Byron..."All who would win joy, must share it; happiness was born a twin". Mrs. Battista wishes to share her work with you, the teacher who joyfully commits her life to making happy, successful children.